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REMARKS

This *Preliminary Amendment* and the accompanying *Response to Restriction Requirement* are filed (via facsimile transmission pursuant to 37 CFR 1.8) in response to the Office action mail-dated 21 April 2006.

By this *Preliminary Amendment*: claims 1-12 are canceled; claims 14 and 20 are amended; claims 23-34 are added. Claims 13-34 are now in the application; claims 13, 25 and 31 are independent claims.

The original claims (claims 1-22) number twenty-two total claims, including three independent claims. The claims presented by amendment herein equally number twenty-two total claims, including three independent claims. Applicant believes that no fee is due in association with this *Preliminary Amendment* and the accompanying *Response to Restriction Requirement*; nevertheless, the Office is respectfully requested to charge any required fees to Deposit Account No. 50-0958.

Applicant respectfully requests entry of this "Preliminary Amendment" prior to an Office action on the merits. "A preliminary amendment is an amendment that is received in the Office... on or before the mail date of the first Office action under 37 CFR 1.104..." 37 CFR 1.115(a); see also, MPEP 714.01(e). Applicant hopefully suggests that entry of this *Preliminary Amendment* is appropriate in that such entry will not unduly interfere with the Examiner's preparation of the Office action on the merits. See 37 CFR 1.115(b); MPEP 714.01(e).

The Office action requires restriction to one of two groups of claims, viz., Group "I" (claims 1-12) and Group "II" (claims 13-22). By the accompanying *Response to Restriction Requirement*, Applicant

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elects Group "II" (claims 13-22) without traverse.

Claims 1-12 are canceled herein by Applicant for the sole purpose of making possible the addition of claims 23-34, as Group "II"-concordant claims, without incurring any additional fees. Applicant respectfully reserves the right to pursue patent protection as to claims 1-12 and claims similar thereto in one or more future applications.

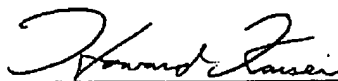
Claims 14 and 20 are each amended in a minor formal way, merely to delete the inadvertent word "and" at line 4.

New claims 23-34 are based upon or derived from canceled original claims 1-12, and are amply supported in the specification. New claims 23 and 24 depend (indirectly) from original independent claim 13. The set of new claims 25-30 loosely corresponds to the set of original claims 1-7. The set of new claims 31-34 loosely corresponds to the set of original claims 8-12.

Applicant believes that Group "II" can be reasonably considered to encompass claims 13-34. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests examination on the merits as to claims 13-34.

If there are any questions concerning this matter, Examiner Lobo is respectfully invited to call Att'y Kaiser at tel. no. 301-227-1834.

Respectfully submitted,



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05/18/06
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